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# Special assistance to Central African countries receiving refugees

## Report of the Secretary-General

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# I. Introduction

1. The present report describes United Nations agencies' and other organizations' activities in respect to special assistance to Central African countries hosting refugees, in particular in the priority areas of women, children, food assistance and the environment. It also describes the main activities undertaken in areas where large numbers of refugees have returned in their countries of origin. Activities of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), under its Great Lakes Operation, cover refugees in Burundi, Rwanda and the United Republic of Tanzania, as well as activities in favour of refugees from Burundi, Rwanda and the Congo in the Democratic Republic of the Congo; refugees from Burundi, Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo in the Congo; and refugees from Burundi, Rwanda, the Congo and the Democratic Republic of the Congo in all other countries in Central, East, West and Southern Africa.

# II. Country activities

## A. Burundi

### 1. Children

2. Although widespread insecurity in Burundi, combined with the effects of regional sanctions, have restricted United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) access and ability to provide humanitarian assistance in some regions, emergency interventions have been revised and health , education and other services extended as much as possible, with special focus on the needs of children and vulnerable groups in the regroupment centres for internally displaced persons. There is a continued need to support an estimated 500,000 people in camps for the displaced. Education enrolment has been successfully completed for 150,000 children, but at least 50 per cent of primary school children are not still in school.

3. UNHCR identified, registered and traced unaccompanied children arriving either through transit centres or spontaneously in provinces in the border areas. If the families of unaccompanied minors could not be found, UNHCR, together with implementing partners, placed the children with foster families. UNHCR also supported initiatives taken by the local authorities to solve the problems of vulnerable persons among returnees. Income-generating activities were developed, essentially in Bujumbura, to enable vulnerable persons to become self-sufficient.

### 2. Environment

4. A notable achievement in Burundi has been the reforestation programme covering areas formerly hosting Rwandan refugees. This project aimed to compensate for the environmental damage resulting from the prolonged presence of large groups of refugees. Through provincial agriculture and forestry authorities, UNHCR has planted over 4,400,000 trees, covering an area of more than 2,200 hectares in the Kirundo, Muyinga, Kayanza and Ngozi provinces. In addition, UNHCR provided the necessary inputs for the production of 2,000,000 fruit plants to be distributed in the same provinces. Following a request made by local authorities and in coordination with the relevant ministries in Burundi, UNHCR will continue its reforestation programme during the first six months of 1998 in the provinces most directly affected by the presence of refugees.

### 3. Food assistance

5. The World Food Programme (WFP) provides emergency food assistance to an average of approximately 175,000 Burundians displaced by the violent hostilities. Distributions are carried out on an ad hoc basis for periods of 15 to 30 days in order to avoid dependency. WFP also targets food assistance to 25,000 orphans, unaccompanied children, the handicapped and the sick, as well as to 50,000 moderately to severely malnourished persons, mainly women and children, through special feeding programmes undertaken in collaboration with UNICEF.

6. Reinstallation of regrouped/internally displaced people and the repatriation of refugees continues to be an important goal of WFP's Burundi operation. Although serious insecurity continues to hinder the full implementation of this programme, WFP has been providing three-month reinstallation food packages to returning Burundians (former internally displaced persons and refugees).

7. Finally, about 54,000 people, mostly women, are participating in and benefiting from WFP supported food-for-work micro-projects aimed at the rehabilitation of infrastructure, environmental protection and income-generation.

## B. Democratic Republic of the Congo

### 1. Children

8. In eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, UNICEF has provided emergency health, nutrition, water and sanitation assistance to local affected populations. Assistance has also been provided to children among refugee

populations in acute need, including care and reunification of thousands of unaccompanied minors.

9. In the confusion of late 1996, when large numbers of Rwandans either returned home or fled westward into the Democratic Republic of the Congo, UNHCR lost track of many unaccompanied children. In addition, large numbers became separated from their families during flight or saw their parents die of hunger, disease or violence.

10. Search operations near Kisangani and in other areas where refugees were concentrated revealed a large number of separated children. On several occasions, children and aid workers included in these searches became targets of armed attacks. UNHCR efforts, together with partner agencies, such as UNICEF, Save the Children Fund/UK, the Red Cross, Concern, *Médecins sans frontières* and Orbis, to find, care for and evacuate this most vulnerable group were hampered by many factors, including security concerns, difficulty of access and the continuation of hostilities, which often forced the children into hiding.

11. When UNHCR scaled down its evacuation operation from the Democratic Republic of the Congo to Rwanda, the protection of children remained both a priority and a problem. In some areas, UNHCR and partner agency staff were unable to identify families "fostering" refugee children, either because foster families feared reprisals or wished to keep the children. Sizeable numbers of refugee children were located among families of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in such places as Goma, Bukavu and Uvira, where the authorities maintained a policy requiring their repatriation. This policy, which was often echoed by the local population, raised difficult questions about the best interests of those children for whom family tracing was impossible.

12. Burundi refugee children separated from their families were also in an extremely delicate situation. For most of the year, security in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and in their country of origin seemed equally precarious. Again, aid staff had difficulty in locating and monitoring these children, especially those in foster families in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. By July 1998, the decision was taken to assemble at Uvira, for security reasons, Burundi children separated from their families. Several were transferred to Burundi following successful advance tracing. Efforts to transport more of them to Bujumbura while tracing was being carried out were aborted after security conditions declined in Burundi. Several hundred separated children from Burundi remain at Uvira and its environs, while efforts continue to register them and trace their families.

### 2. Environment

13. In the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the principal focus of infrastructure projects was the reforestation of 2,500 hectares of refugee camp sites and surrounding affected areas. Approximately three million seedlings were raised and planted with the support of 100 small local nurseries. An agro-forestry project was also financed for production of seeds and environmental education.

### 3. Food assistance

14. WFP is providing food aid to approximately 45,000 beneficiaries in north and south Kivu. Assistance is provided to the internally displaced while they resettle and re-establish their productive activities, as well as to vulnerable groups (orphans, malnourished children and adults being treated in nutritional centres) and to other population groups severely affected by the insecurity.

## C. The Congo

15. UNHCR has facilitated the repatriation of Rwandans in the Congo who agreed to return, and has considered alternative solutions for those not wishing to do so. A demographic profile has been established (registration of refugees, names, identification), and consultations have been held with the Government on a future categorization exercise and local settlement possibilities for those who are not excluded from refugee status.

### 1. Children

16. At Congo-Brazzaville, UNICEF maintained emergency activities during five months of the war in order to assist children, women and other vulnerable groups in the sectors of health, nutrition, water and sanitation and psycho-social care for traumatized children. More than 2,000 children are being assisted through the UNICEF child trauma project. In addition, under the coordination of UNHCR, humanitarian agencies, including UNICEF, continue to provide assistance to some 400 Rwandan unaccompanied children who remain at Congo-Brazzaville.

### 2. Food assistance

17. In collaboration with UNHCR, WFP has provided food assistance to 8,000 refugees in the Congo.

## D. Rwanda

### 1. Children

18. In Rwanda, the rapid and massive return of people has increased dramatically the reintegration and rehabilitation needs of the country. UNICEF has focused on quickly expanding essential services – health, nutrition, education and social services – to meet the urgent needs of returning children. Special assistance has been extended to unaccompanied, traumatized minors and other children in distress. Currently, some 6,200 unaccompanied children in institutions, 6,000 street children, 3,000 youth in detention, 60,000 child-headed households and 500 children in institutions for former child soldiers are covered under this programme.

19. Despite tremendous efforts made by the Government of Rwanda, United Nations agencies, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and non-governmental organizations, some 6,000 children who have lost or been separated from their families remain in 48 centres, waiting to be reunited with their families or for an alternative durable solution. Many left Rwanda when they were very young or were born in exile. They are unable to provide information to assist in family tracing. However, creative efforts by some non-governmental organizations' staff have resulted in some progress in reuniting a number of these *sans adresse* children with their families. The Government's strategy is to try to promote care in families rather than in orphanages. It has thus developed a foster family programme for children for whom no family member can be traced. In close cooperation with the Government and in constant dialogue with UNICEF, ICRC and non-governmental organizations involved in this programme, UNHCR has contributed to tracing activities and medium and long-term plans for these children. UNHCR has alleviated current problems by assisting some of the children who remain in transit centres, through support for tracing activities being carried out by implementing partners and by participating in the elaboration of a long-term plan to address the special needs of unaccompanied minors in Rwanda.

20. Non-governmental organizations have coordinated and implemented the national programme of mass tracing in Rwanda, as well as assuming responsibility for the registration of all unaccompanied minors identified at the UNHCR transit centres. Identification, documentation, tracing and reunification activities have been carried out by social workers employed by Save the Children/UK (operating with partial UNHCR funding). World Vision, Concern, the International Rescue Committee, Red Barnet, Food for the Hungry International and *Médecins sans frontières* have also implemented UNHCR activities in favour of unaccompanied children.

### 2. Women

21. The Rwanda Women's Initiative (RWI) is intended to extend reconciliation assistance to the survivors of the genocide, the majority of whom are women (an estimated 54 per cent of the population are women, and 34 per cent of all households are headed by women). The central objective of RWI is to promote and achieve the individual and collective empowerment of women through activities that afford them greater economic independence and increase their sense of self-worth. RWI has addressed the problems resulting from discriminatory cultural practices, homelessness, inadequate health care and post-genocide trauma faced by most female survivors of the genocide. RWI is implemented in collaboration with the Minister of Gender, Family and Social Affairs, and complements activities undertaken by bilateral donors through the same Ministry.

### 3. Environment/forestry

22. UNHCR environmental activities in Rwanda are designed to address the damage caused during 1995, 1996 and 1997. Environmental protection activities have included the establishment of nursery beds and wood lots for the planting of a greater quantity of fast-growing trees to reduce further environmental degradation caused by the large number of returnees. Other important environmental protection activities consisted of the production of energy-saving stoves, soil conservation and termite control. It is anticipated that the planting of fast-growing trees will lead to an improved forest management system. UNHCR has targeted these activities in the major returnee settlement areas. The major beneficiaries were returnees, particularly women, who regularly cut trees for cooking purposes. A termite control programme was undertaken in the most affected areas, such as Kibungo, Umutara and Cyangugu, because damage from termites severely impacts the reforestation programme. UNHCR has worked very closely with the Government of Rwanda, United Nations agencies and operational partners in this regard.

### 4. Food assistance

23. In collaboration with UNHCR, WFP has provided food assistance to 29,000 refugees in Rwanda. WFP has also provided food assistance to food insecure households, internally displaced persons and returnees, as well as

mounting nutritional support programmes in support of rehabilitation activities.

24. WFP food packages have significantly contributed to the overall success of the process of resettlement, reintegration and reconciliation in Rwanda. This assistance will continue for refugees still returning to Rwanda.

25. WFP also remains a key agency in Rwanda in the field of post-emergency rehabilitation through the implementation of food-for-work schemes across the country. These schemes are aimed at facilitating the rehabilitation and reintegration of returnees, and at helping the non-returnee population to cope with the impact that the sudden and massive repatriation has had on the economy. For instance, through its food-for-work scheme, WFP supports the housing construction programme, which aims to redress the very serious national housing shortage and the rehabilitation of basic infrastructure, including primary and secondary roads, schools and other public facilities.

26. In addition, targeted food assistance is provided to those temporarily displaced as a result of the return of refugees to their original homes, as well as to food insecure households and through nutritional support programmes. WFP is also promoting repatriation by ensuring that sufficient quantities of food are available as transit and repatriation rations for all those wishing to return to their countries of origin.

## E. United Republic of Tanzania

### 1. Children

27. UNHCR has collaborated with ICRC in tracing activities for approximately 1,400 unaccompanied minors in all camps in the United Republic of Tanzania. During 1997, approximately 80,000 children attended primary school in the camps. UNHCR adopted the concept "Education for repatriation", using the home country curriculum, which aimed to prepare the children for reintegration upon repatriation.

28. In response to a growing influx of refugees from Burundi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo into the United Republic of Tanzania, UNICEF established an operational base at Kigoma, and worked closely with Tanzanian authorities, UNHCR, WFP and non-governmental organizations to meet the essential needs of affected children, covering emergency health, nutrition, water and sanitation assistance.

### 2. Women

29. The issue of equal participation of female refugees in the management and life of camps has been a constant concern of UNHCR. Some progress has been achieved in the participation of women in food distribution in the camps and provision of sanitary material and appropriate clothing. The problem of sexual violence has been addressed, and it is hoped that with staff devoted specifically to this issue and with strengthened security in the camps, there will be a reduction in the incidents of rape and other violence against refugee women. Reduced resources, however, have hampered efforts in such areas as education for women, where their participation has continued to be low, with drop-out rates for schoolgirls as high as 75 per cent of total drop-outs.

### 3. Food assistance

30. In collaboration with UNHCR, WFP has provided food assistance to 410,000 refugees in the United Republic of Tanzania. Many local communities that border the refugee camps in western United Republic of Tanzania suffer from serious food insecurity and poor or no access to adequate health and educational facilities. WFP is providing food assistance to insecure Tanzanians through community food-for-work programmes, hospital feeding and nutritional assistance to vulnerable groups.

### 4. Environment

31. During 1997, the Kagera Environment Programme, implemented by CARE International in cooperation with many camp management and community services agencies, has continued its environmental rehabilitation and mitigation activities, in such areas as environmental education, energy conservation, protection of trees, production and distribution of tree seedlings to both refugee and local populations, erosion control, promotion of agro-forestry practices, fuelwood harvesting, clean-up and rehabilitation (5 camps at Karagwe), and monitoring of natural resources used (Muyovosi camp). The lack of firewood and the application of strict enforcement measures of the 4-kilometre restriction of movement has necessitated an urgent review of UNHCR policy regarding fuelwood supply and procurement. Fuelwood distribution for vulnerable groups started at Ngara towards the end of 1997. Environment liaison officers (former forest guards) in Nyarugusu have been trained in tree-planting and agro-forestry techniques, and have been given the task of disseminating information to the cultivators, mainly to allow natural regeneration where trees have been cut.

32. Energy conservation measures have included the continued promotion of improved stoves. In addition, there have been campaigns to raise community awareness of energy-efficient cooking methods. Studies have been carried out on grass-burning stoves and alternative fuels, and refugees have been trained in the construction and use of the "hay basket" or fireless cooker, a new energy-saving cooking technology.

33. The natural vegetation in Kigoma has suffered less damage than that in the Kagera region, and UNHCR is taking early protective and compensatory measures, such as forest protection, tree planting, tree nurseries and erosion control in critical areas. To mitigate the damage created by uncontrolled tree cutting, tree planting activities will be initiated and programmes for fuel efficient stoves will be expanded. A Forestry Officer will provide the required technical support. An Environment Coordinator is overseeing all environmental activities in the Kigoma region.

## III. Inter-agency cooperation and financing

34. In order to support Central African countries receiving refugees, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat has strengthened its field coordination units in Rwanda, Burundi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and has established a new coordination unit in Uganda. The principal task of the field coordination units is to support the United Nations resident or humanitarian coordinator in his/her capacity as coordinator of the emergency relief activities of the United Nations system, to ensure the timely dissemination of information on humanitarian developments, and to identify constraints, shortfalls and needs in the overall implementation of the programmes.

35. In support of resource mobilization for humanitarian activities of United Nations agencies, in March 1998 the Office launched the United Nations Consolidated Inter-Agency Appeal for Countries of the Great Lakes Region and Central Africa. The Appeal has proposed humanitarian programmes for the region in the amount of $550,500,000, of which $159,200,000 is for assistance to refugees and returnees, including multisectoral repatriation and reintegration, emergency care and maintenance assistance. However, the international donor response to the Appeal has been poor, which has seriously hampered the effectiveness of United Nations agencies in implementing the necessary programmes. As of 30 May 1998, only $49,500,000 had been pledged against the Appeal, representing 8.6 per cent of the overall requirements.

## IV. Conclusion

36. Lack of funding is a cause of great concern in the implementation of programmes on behalf of refugees in Central Africa. Given continuing instability in the region, providing adequate protection and assistance for refugees is both a priority of the United Nations and an ongoing challenge.